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**Perceived contract violation and job satisfaction: Buffering roles of emotion regulation
skills and work-related self-efficacy**

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Perceived contract violation and job satisfaction: Buffering roles of emotion regulation skills and work-related self-efficacy

Abstract

Purpose—This paper investigates how employees' perceptions of psychological contract violation, or sense of organizational betrayal, might diminish their job satisfaction, as well as how their access to two critical personal resources—emotion regulation skills and work-related self-efficacy—might buffer this negative relationship.

Design/methodology/approach—Two-wave survey data came from employees of Pakistani-based organizations.

Findings—Perceived contract violation reduces job satisfaction, but the effect is weaker at higher levels of emotion regulation skills and work-related self-efficacy.

Practical implications—For organizations, these results show that the frustrations that come with a sense of organizational betrayal can be contained more easily to the extent that their employees can draw from relevant personal resources.

Originality/value—This investigation provides a more complete understanding of when perceived contract violation will deplete employees' emotional resources, in the form of feelings of happiness about their job situation. A sense of organizational betrayal is less likely to escalate into reduced job satisfaction when employees can control their negative emotions and feel confident about their work-related competencies.

Keywords—perceived contract violation; job satisfaction; emotion regulation skills; work-related self-efficacy; conservation of resources theory

Paper type—Research paper

Introduction

Employees' exposure to adverse, resource-depleting work conditions is a critical concern for managers, because of its harmful consequences for employees' work motivation and performance (Abbas et al., 2014; Fu and Cheng, 2014; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000; Hu and Cheng, 2010; Perko et al., 2017). For example, workplace adversity can cause employees to experience frustration, especially if they believe their employer has violated its psychological contract—namely, the tacit agreement about its obligations toward employees (Cheung et al., 2017; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Sonnenberg et al., 2011). Psychological contract violations become manifest in employees' sense that they have been betrayed and their emotional distress in response to broken promises and unmet expectations (Robinson and Morrison, 2000). In contrast with perceptions of contract breaches—which refer to employees' cognition that their employer has failed to meet its obligations, with indirect impacts on their organizational functioning (Cassar and Briner, 2011; Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Zagenczyk et al., 2009)—perceptions of contract violations are more affective in nature and involve deeply felt emotional responses with *direct* consequences for employees' mental well-being (Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016; Raja et al., 2004; Sutton and Griffin, 2004). This latter concept has received burgeoning research attention, but its persistence and threat to employees' mental well-being highlights the need for on-going investigations, particularly in terms of its negative outcomes and how to contain them (Arshad, 2016; Rai and Agarwal, 2018).

Such negative outcomes, as identified by prior research, may include depressive mood states (Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016), organizational cynicism (Biswas, 2016), higher turnover intentions (Arshad, 2016), decreased trust in the employer (Tomprou et al., 2012), and reduced organizational commitment (Bao et al., 2011; Cassar and Briner, 2011). This study seeks to

investigate another potentially harmful effect of employees' sense of organizational betrayal: the depletion of their positive emotional resources in relation to their employment, in the form of reduced job satisfaction (Anand et al., 2015; Little et al., 2011; Sun and Pan, 2008). Beyond general acknowledgment that employees who blame their organization for broken promises experience less satisfaction with their day-to-day organizational functioning (Suazo, 2009; Sutton and Griffin, 2004), further research is needed to define ways to contain these detrimental effects (Chrobot-Mason, 2003). The key objective of this research therefore is to investigate the roles that two critical personal resources—emotion regulation skills (Jiang et al., 2013) and work-related self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997)—might play in *mitigating* the translation of perceived contract violations into lower job satisfaction. These resources capture employees' ability to control their own emotions, and their confidence that they can execute their work tasks successfully, respectively. By focusing on job satisfaction, or its lack thereof, as a critical outcome of perceived contract violations, we explicitly recognize that positive feelings of enthusiasm and excitement about a job are instrumental for employees' personal well-being and workplace performance (Judge et al., 2001; Sun and Pan, 2008).

COR theory

To anchor the theoretical arguments about the relationship between perceived contract violations and job satisfaction, and the individual circumstances in which this manifestation of organizational adversity might be more or less likely to limit job satisfaction, we draw from conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). According to this theory, perceptions of organizational adversity are frustrating and resource draining, so employees seek to conserve positive emotional resources for areas other than work (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). Similarly, if employees sense that their employer has not kept its promises, which

prevents them from meeting personal work goals, they may become so upset that they stop feeling excited about coming to work (Chrobot-Mason, 2003). Emotional distress due to broken organizational premises is frustrating for employees and thus might diminish their job satisfaction (Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016),

In addition, COR theory argues that employees' negative reactions to resource-draining work conditions may vary, according to whether they possess adequate personal resources to compensate for resource losses (Abbas et al., 2014; De Clercq et al., 2019; Hobfoll, 2001; Sender et al., 2018). Similarly, we propose that two critical personal resources (emotion regulation skills and work-related self-efficacy) might buffer against the depletion of positive emotional resource bases, in response to violated psychological contracts. That is, the negative relationship between employees' perceived contract violations and job satisfaction might be less salient to the extent that they can draw from personal factors that either (1) directly help them cope successfully with the associated emotional distress (emotion regulation skills) (2) or indirectly enable them to perform their job, even while sensing organizational betrayal (work-related self-efficacy). Together, these two factors offer a parsimonious, yet comprehensive, view of how employees' reliance on adequate personal resources might reduce the likelihood that they feel unhappiness about their job situation, even when they believe their employer has not kept its promises.

Access to relevant resources should enable employees to cope with the emotional distress caused by a sense of organizational betrayal (Chrobot-Mason, 2003; Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016; Raja et al., 2004), so they might retain more positive feelings about their job situation (Hobfoll, 2001).

Contributions

With this approach, we seek to make several contributions to management research. First, we leverage COR theory to propose and show that perceptions of violated psychological

contracts can spread like an infection and deplete positive emotional resources, in the form of reduced job satisfaction, *and* we specify how this relationship may be buffered by access to relevant personal resources (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). Employees who experience a sense of organizational betrayal might doubt their long-term career prospects in the organization (Arshad, 2016; Rai and Agarawal, 2018) and thus suffer emotional resource drainage in relation to their work (Abbas et al., 2014; Anand et al., 2015). By focusing on the buffering or immunizing roles of employees' emotion regulation skills and work-related self-efficacy in this process, we respond to calls to apply contingency approaches to negative psychological contract situations and the associated need for research that clarifies *when* stress-inducing employment conditions are less likely to spur negative job attitudes (Biswas, 2016; Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016; Restubog et al., 2015). Employees' negative responses to resource-draining contract violations, in the form of diminished job satisfaction, should be mitigated by these two personal resources (Hobfoll, 2000). With this theorizing, we also give managers practical insights into how to immunize their employee bases against a detrimental sense of betrayal or broken promises, by stimulating them to develop and hone their own personal skills.

Second, our empirical focus is on Pakistan, which addresses the need for more research on the negative implications of unfavourable psychological contract situations in non-Western settings (Arain et al., 2012; Arshad, 2016; Bao et al., 2011; Biswas, 2016). Many countries in Asia, including Pakistan, are characterized by high levels of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede et al., 2010), such that the emotional distress that employees experience when suffering from uncertainty-inducing organizational betrayal might be particularly prominent in defining the quality of their day-to-day functioning. The high power distance that marks Pakistani culture also indicates that some employers may have little concern about breaking previously made promises

to employees (Khan et al., 2016), so a sense of organizational betrayal may be salient in many organizations. Accordingly, our theoretical focus on the concurrent roles of perceived contract violations and relevant personal resources on employees' job satisfaction should be highly relevant to our study's empirical context, as well as other, less frequently studied countries with comparable cultural profiles.

Conceptual framework

Figure 1 summarizes the proposed conceptual framework and its constitutive hypotheses. First, we link employees' perceived contract violations with their job satisfaction. Second, we predict that this relationship depends on their emotion regulation skills and work-related self-efficacy, two critical personal resources that inform their ability to deal with stress-inducing employment situations. Consistent with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), we anticipate that perceived contract violations diminish job satisfaction, but the effect is mitigated when employees can draw from these two personal resources.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Hypotheses

Perceived contract violations and job satisfaction

We predict a negative relationship between employees' perceptions of a contract violation and their job satisfaction. According to COR theory, the emotional distress that employees experience in response to broken organizational promises depletes the positive emotional resources that they have available for their current job situation (Hobfoll, 1989; Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016). That is, unfavourable organizational treatment leads employees to protect themselves by conserving their positive emotional resources for areas outside work (Chen et al., 2016; Hobfoll, 2001; Sun and Pan, 2008). To the extent that employees feel emotionally

distressed because they blame the organization for broken promises, they likely develop frustration and anger toward their employer (Biswas, 2016; Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016; Restubog et al., 2015), which undermines their happiness with their current job situation (Geddes and Callister, 2007). Thus, positive emotions about their current job situation likely disappear when employees feel frustrated with how their employer has treated them and failed to meet their expectations (Sutton and Griffin, 2004).

Moreover, when they feel anger toward their organization because of a sense of betrayal, employees likely believe that their daily work efforts are not appreciated, so they may interpret the contract violation as signalling a lack of consideration of their contributions to organizational effectiveness (Bao et al., 2011; Biswas, 2016). Such attributions likely generate negative emotions, including dissatisfaction with the present job situation and concerns about their future with the organization (Arshad, 2016). Conversely, if employees feel supported and respected, because their employer has kept its promises toward them, they should sense greater appreciation for their daily work efforts and feel more enthusiastic about coming to work (Raja et al., 2004; Suazo, 2009). Overall then, employees' job satisfaction should diminish to the extent they experience emotional distress due to their sense that they have been betrayed by their organization's failure to respect previously made promises.

Hypothesis 1: There is a negative relationship between employees' perceived contract violations and their job satisfaction.

Moderating role of emotion regulation skills

The negative relationship between perceived contract violations and job satisfaction should be mitigated by employees' emotion regulation skills. According to COR theory, the resource-depleting effect of adverse organizational treatments is buffered to the extent that

employees can compensate for resource losses with access to relevant personal resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Emotionally skilled employees are better positioned to deal with and contain the anger that results from broken organizational promises, because they can control and suppress the negative energy prompted by this adversity (Buruck et al., 2016; Gratz and Roemer, 2004; Jiang et al., 2013), which diminishes the chances that they experience dissatisfaction with their job situation (Quinn et al., 2012). Previous studies affirm that employees equipped with strong emotion regulation skills apply more effective coping strategies when they face adverse organizational situations, compared with their less emotionally skilled counterparts (Buruck et al. 2016; Eisenberg and Farbes, 1992; Gross, 1998). When they feel betrayed by their organization, emotionally skilled employees still should remain more confident that they can protect themselves against the negative consequences of the broken promises (Cassar and Briner, 2011; Robinson and Morrison, 2000), and their emotional resource reservoirs, in the form of positive feelings about their job situation, should be depleted to a lesser extent (Sun and Pan, 2008).

Employees equipped with emotion regulation skills also can adapt more effectively to adverse organizational situations and protect against the related emotional hardships, because they may assign such adversity a role, in terms of how organizations function and compete in the external environment (Gratz and Roemer, 2004; Gross, 2002). Thus they may become more immune to the “infection” by which unfavourable organizational treatment escalates into negative feelings toward the employer (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). Employees with good control over their emotions even may be somewhat attracted to unfavourable organizational situations, because finding effective ways to survive or thrive in such challenging settings can be personally fulfilling (Biron and van Veldhoven, 2012; Sy et al., 2006). Thus, emotion regulation skills might spur not only employees’ ability to address the negative outcomes of perceived

contract violations but also their sense of personal joy (Ryan and Deci, 2000), because they feel energized by their ability to protect themselves against the negative outcomes of psychological contract violations. The emotional resource drainage that typically comes with such violations (Raja et al., 2004) gets compensated for, by pride in their ability to remain immune to the hardships (Donoso et al., 2015; Gratz and Roemer, 2004), which ultimately reduces the threat of diminished job satisfaction. Overall then, employees' emotion regulation skills buffer the negative relationship between perceived contract violations and job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: The negative relationship between employees' perceived contract violations and their job satisfaction is moderated by their emotion regulation skills, such that the relationship is weaker at higher levels of emotion regulation skills.

Moderating role of work-related self-efficacy

The negative relationship between perceived contract violations and job satisfaction also should be mitigated by employees' work-related self-efficacy. This personal resource enables employees to identify adequate solutions to unfavourable organizational situations (Bandura, 1997; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Schmitz and Ganesan, 2014), thus lowering the likelihood that efficacious employees perceive unmet organizational promises as insurmountable obstacles to their happiness at work (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). For example, highly efficacious employees who feel betrayed by their organization may allocate significant energy to attempts to *undo* the damage, such as by applying their personal ability to voice and explain why breaking previously made promises is not an acceptable practice (Mastenbroek et al., 2014). Less efficacious employees instead might get absorbed in negative thoughts and circular thinking about the organizational betrayal and the negative aspects of their work situation (Heuven et al., 2006), such that their job satisfaction diminishes further. Studies affirm that employees with high levels of work-related self-efficacy use more divergent and adequate coping strategies in the presence

of stressful work situations, compared with their less efficacious counterparts (Bandura, 1997; Heuven et al., 2006).

Similar to those with good emotion regulation skills, employees with greater confidence in their work-related competencies might also consider finding effective solutions to adverse organizational situations appealing (Gagne and Deci, 2005; van Seggelen-Damen and van Dam, 2016), such that they experience positive fulfilment when they thrive in the job *despite* the challenge of broken organizational promises (Lee and Akhtar, 2007). Thus, work-related self-efficacy is a personal resource that may stimulate both employees' ability and motivation to address the negative consequences of organizational betrayal (Ghorbannejad & Esakhani, 2016; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Conversely, when employees cannot draw from high levels of work-related self-efficacy, their efforts to resolve the emotional distress caused by broken promises and unmet expectations may be more passive (Gist and Mitchell, 1992; Lee and Akhtar, 2007), reducing the likelihood that they remain satisfied with their present job situation. Overall, the personal resource of work-related self-efficacy serves as important protection against the escalation of perceived contract violations into diminished job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: The negative relationship between employees' perceived contract violations and their job satisfaction is moderated by their work-related self-efficacy, such that the relationship is weaker at higher levels of work-related self-efficacy.

Research method

Sample and data collection

To test the research hypotheses, we collected data from employees in four Pakistani-based organizations that operate in the telecom and textile sectors. These two sectors were included because of their highly competitive nature in Pakistan (Abbas and Waheed, 2017; Kianto et al., 2019), such that it may not be uncommon that organizations have to change or

violate some of the promises that they made previously to their employees. Hence, the investigation of how employees respond to beliefs that their psychological contracts have been violated is highly relevant in this context.

The data collection took place through a two-wave research design, using a time lag of three weeks. This time period was chosen because it was sufficiently long to mitigate concerns about reverse causality but not so long that significant organizational events could have taken place during the data collection; the three-week time gap also is consistent with previous studies (e.g., De Clercq et al., 2018; Haq et al., 2018). The surveys were in English, the official language of higher education and business communication in Pakistan. The instructions that accompanied the surveys emphasized the participants' complete confidentiality (i.e., that the focus was on the analysis of aggregate data patterns and that no individual identifying information would ever be revealed), the lack of right or wrong answers, the expectation that people would give varied responses to the questions, and the importance of answering the questions as honestly as possible. These clarifications help minimize social desirability and acquiescence biases (Spector, 2006).

The first survey included measures of employees' perceived contract violations, emotion regulation skills, and work-related self-efficacy; the second survey assessed their job satisfaction. The participants were randomly selected from employee lists that were provided by the human resource departments of the participating organizations, in order to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Participation was completely voluntary, and we assured employees that their employers would not know who participated. After they had responded to the survey questions, the participants put the surveys in sealed envelopes and returned them to one of the authors. Of the 350 surveys distributed in the first round, we received 247 responses. Three weeks later,

these respondents were contacted again, which generated 183 responses. After removing incomplete surveys, we retained 178 complete response sets for the statistical analyses, for a response rate of 51%. Among the respondents, 24% were women, 21% had masters degrees, and they had worked for the organization for an average of seven years;

Measures

The measures of the each of the four focal constructs came from previous research.

Job satisfaction. We measured the extent to which employees feel happy with their job situation with a six-item job satisfaction scale, using five-point Likert anchors (Abbas et al., 2014; Agho et al., 1992). Sample items included “I am satisfied with my job for the time being” and “Most days I am enthusiastic about my work” (Cronbach’s alpha = .82).

Perceived contract violations. To assess the emotional distress that employees might experience due to a sense of organizational betrayal, we applied a four-item, five-point Likert scale of perceived contract violations (Biswas, 2016; Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016; Robinson and Morrison, 2000). For example, employees rated their agreement with two statements: “I feel betrayed by my organization” and “I feel that my organization has violated its contract with me” (Cronbach’s alpha = .93).

Emotion regulation skills. To gather employees’ perceptions of their ability to control their emotions, we applied a four-item scale of emotion regulation capabilities, using six-point Likert anchors, based on Jiang and colleagues (2013). Two example items were “I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions” and “I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry” (Cronbach’s alpha = .88).

Work-related self-efficacy. To gauge employees’ confidence in their work-related competencies, we applied a six-item scale of self-efficacy, using six-point Likert anchors

(Luthans, Avolio, Avey, and Norman, 2007; Parker, 1998). Two sample statements were “I feel confident helping to set targets/goals in my work area” and “I feel confident in representing my work area in meetings with management” (Cronbach’s alpha = .81).

Control variables. We included three control variables: gender (1 = female), education (1 = masters degree), and organizational tenure (in years), in line with previous research on the prediction of job satisfaction (e.g., De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2017b; Raja, Johns, and Bilgrami, 2011). For example, the stronger intrinsic motivation that female employees may derive from their work, as well as the greater job responsibilities among higher educated and more experienced employees, could enhance job satisfaction levels.

Results

Table 1 shows the zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics, and Table 2 contains the regression results. Model 1 features the control variables, Model 2 adds perceived contract violations and the two personal resources, and Models 3–4 include the two interaction terms: perceived contract violations \times emotion regulation skills and perceived contract violations \times work-related self-efficacy. It is appropriate to add multiple interaction terms separately, because their simultaneous inclusion in one model can mask true moderating effects (Aiken and West, 1991; Covin et al., 2006; De Clercq et al., 2016; Zahra and Hayton 2008). For the interactions, we mean-centred the product terms (Aiken and West, 1991).

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here]

In support of our baseline argument in Hypothesis 1 that emotional distress, caused by a sense of organizational betrayal, depletes the positive emotional resources that employees have, Model 2 reveals that perceived contract violations relate negatively to job satisfaction ($\beta = -.178$, $p < .001$). Although beyond our study’s primary theoretical focus, Model 2 also reveals direct

positive relationships of emotion regulation skills ($\beta = .127, p < .01$) and work-related self-efficacy ($\beta = .254, p < .001$) with job satisfaction.

Models 3–4 support the hypothesized buffering effects of emotion regulation skills ($\beta = .069, p < .05$) and work-related self-efficacy ($\beta = .090, p < .01$) on the relationship between perceived contract violations and job satisfaction. The likelihood that employees' increasing beliefs about violated psychological contracts undermine their job satisfaction decreases when they can draw from their emotion regulation skills (Hypothesis 2) and work-related self-efficacy (Hypothesis 3). We depict these results in Figure 2 and 3, with corresponding slope analyses (Aiken and West, 1991). The relationship of perceived contract violations and job satisfaction is significant when emotion regulation skills ($\beta = -.231, p < .001$) or work-related self-efficacy ($\beta = -.251, p < .001$) are low, but the relationship becomes not significant at high levels of these moderators ($\beta = -.093, ns$; $\beta = -.071, ns$, respectively), in support of Hypotheses 2 and 3.

[Insert Figures 2 and 3 about here]

Discussion

Theoretical contributions

This study has contributed to extant research in the field of management by elaborating how employees' reliance on relevant personal resources can buffer the likelihood that their perceptions of contract violations, or sense of organizational betrayal (Grame et al., 1998; Robinson and Morrison, 2000), might escalate into reduced job satisfaction. Limited prior attention to this issue is somewhat surprising, because the emotional distress that results from beliefs about adverse employment situations can be countered by access to relevant personal resources (Abbas et al., 2014; De Clercq et al., 2019). Drawing from COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), we have addressed the important questions about how and when perceived contract

violations lead to emotional resource depletion (i.e., lower job satisfaction). This theoretical emphasis on the buffering role of relevant personal resources acknowledges the *incremental* role of perceived contract violations in thwarting job satisfaction; it also gives organizations novel insights into the individual conditions in which emotional distress due to a sense of organizational betrayal may limit employees' enthusiasm or excitement about their job.

The direct negative relationship that we find between perceived contract violations and job satisfaction complements prior findings about the harmful effects of a sense of organizational betrayal on attitudinal responses, such as organizational cynicism (Biswas, 2016) or lower organizational commitment (Cassar and Briner, 2011). When employees feel “violated” by broken promises, they may seek to protect themselves by conserving their positive emotional resources for areas outside work (Chen et al., 2016; Hobfoll, 2001). Yet a notable theoretical insight that arises from this research is that this negative effect of perceived contract violations on job satisfaction can be contained if employees have access to two critical personal resources: emotion regulation skills and work-related self-efficacy. According to COR theory, the resource-depleting effects of adverse employment conditions diminish to the extent that employees can draw from personal resources that prevent further resource losses (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). Similarly, the likelihood that employees grow unhappy with their job situation due to their feelings of organizational betrayal diminishes when they can immunize themselves against the associated emotional distress by applying adequate personal skills. Employees who can control their negative emotions or feel confident about their work-related competencies are less likely to be emotionally drained by violated psychological contracts, because they can cope with and adapt to this unfavourable work situation (Gross, 1998; Heuven et al., 2016). Employees equipped with these personal resources also may derive personal joy from

proactively seeking and finding solutions to adverse employment situations (Ryan and Deci, 2000), which also reduces their frustration and unhappiness. In contrast, employees who cannot draw from these personal resources are less able and less motivated to find effective coping mechanisms, so negative feelings and thwarted job satisfaction likely emerge (Hobfoll, 2001). These findings add to previous research on the roles of personal resources in mitigating the harmful effects of other sources of workplace adversity, such as relationship conflict at work (Jiang et al., 2013) or work–family conflict (Glaser and Hecht, 2013).

Managerial implications

This concurrent interplay of perceived contract violations and personal resources in shaping job satisfaction also has important implications for management practice. When employees feel emotionally distressed by a sense of organizational betrayal, they develop negative energy and feel dissatisfied; organizations should do their best to mitigate such emotional distress. Yet identifying employees who are frustrated about broken organizational promises might be challenging, because employees may not be willing to communicate these feelings, to avoid perceptions that they are weak or ungrateful or complain too much (Rai and Agarwal, 2018). Managers thus must be proactive in detecting the emotional hardships that their employees may experience in response to contract violations, then address the possible sources, such as bullying, authoritarian leadership styles, or a lack of transparency about organizational changes (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Rai and Agarwal, 2018). They also should develop transparent guidelines for employees' treatment, reflecting previously established agreements, and offer training programs to help employees meet their goals, particularly if changes to previously made agreements must take place.

Beyond this general recommendation to avoid distress caused by beliefs about organizational betrayal, this study offers specific insights for companies functioning in competitive environments in which it might be difficult to maintain the status quo, such that they must break some promises to their employees (Porter, 1996). In particular, employees who can control their negative emotions and feel more confident about their work-related capacities are better prepared to deal with emotional distress due to a sense of organizational betrayal. These personal resources reflect two important levers through which organizations can protect employees when some psychological contract violation is unavoidable. In turn, to develop employees' emotion regulation skills, managers might explicate which emotional competencies are most needed to deal with adverse situations involving changes to previously made agreements (Eisenberg and Fabes, 1992). They also could highlight emotionally skilled employee role models who have been effective in their career development, even when faced with disappointments about broken organizational promises. Similarly, to spur employees' work-related self-efficacy, managers could emphasize the value of healthy confidence in work-related competencies, as a means to overcome frustrations about unmet expectations (Mastenbroek et al., 2014). Another option would be to implement appropriate reward and recognition systems; employees should be more motivated to invest personal energy in applying their emotional competencies and work-specific skills to unfavourable work conditions if they receive recognition for these investments (Quinn et al., 2012), which ultimately can enhance positive feelings about their job situation. Overall, any measure that develops and nurtures employees' skills, whether pertaining to emotion control or work-related confidence, should be particularly useful if organizations cannot avoid breaking some promises, because employees equipped with these skills can apply effective coping strategies to handle the associated emotional distress.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study has some limitations that suggest further research directions. First, we used a time lag of three weeks between the measures of perceived contract violations and job satisfaction, to reduce the likelihood of reverse causality but also to limit the likelihood that significant organizational events might occur during the study. Studies with longer time frames might investigate the on-going occurrence and persistence of employees' attitudinal responses to emotional distress over time. In a related vein, we offered both ability-based and motivational arguments for why emotion regulation skills and work-related self-efficacy buffer their responses. Continued research might assess these underlying mechanisms directly and investigate, for example, whether the ability- or motivation-based mechanisms are more prevalent in determining the long-term effects of perceived contract violations on job satisfaction.

Second, we focused on the buffering roles of two specific personal resources and ignored other individual factors that might mitigate the translation of perceived contract violations into lower job satisfaction. For example, the extent to which employees feel passionate about their work (Baum and Locke, 2004), possess high levels of resilience (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017a), or have a strong learning orientation (Hirst et al., 2009) all might help them cope better with hardships due to beliefs about broken organizational promises. Positive *contextual* factors could serve as buffers too, such as compatibility between personal and organizational goals (Vancouver and Schmitt, 1991), trust toward managers (Chang et al., 2016), or the presence of ombudsmen whose mandate is to address organizational mistreatment (Harrison et al., 2013). Future studies could investigate the *relative* potency of these different personal and contextual

factors for preventing perceived contract violations from escalating into unhappy feelings about the job situation.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the critical issue of *when* employees' perceived contract violation is less likely to make them unhappy about their job situation. The likelihood that frustrations that come with a sense of organizational betrayal escalate into lower job satisfaction diminishes to the extent that employees can rely on their emotional regulation skills and work-related self-efficacy. These personal resources enhance employees' ability to cope successfully with pertinent disappointments about an organization that has not met its promises. It is hoped then that this research can serve as a catalyst for continued studies of how organizations can reduce the risk that resource-draining work situations translate into negative job-related feelings.

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Table 1: Correlation table and descriptive statistics

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|----------------------------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|------|-------|
| 1. Job satisfaction | | | | | | | |
| 2. Perceived contract violations | -.454** | | | | | | |
| 3. Emotion regulation skills | -.470** | .499** | | | | | |
| 4. Work-related self-efficacy | -.529** | .478** | .550** | | | | |
| 5. Gender (1 = female) | -.055 | -.081 | .006 | -.001 | | | |
| 6. Education | .084 | -.136 | -.273** | -.151* | .302** | | |
| 7. Organizational tenure | -.054 | .016 | -.091 | .016 | .127 | .078 | |
| Mean | 2.021 | 4.191 | 4.504 | 3.723 | .236 | .208 | 7.107 |
| Standard deviation | .942 | .826 | .719 | .572 | .426 | .407 | 3.401 |

Notes: N = 178.

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 2: Regression results (dependent variable: job satisfaction)

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|--|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| Gender (1 = female) | .063 | -.003 | -.014 | -.009 |
| Education | -.236* | -.023 | -.036 | -.063 |
| Organizational tenure | .004 | .005 | .004 | .002 |
| Perceived contract violations | | -.178*** | -.162*** | -.161*** |
| Emotion regulation skills | | .127** | .116* | .122* |
| Work-related self-efficacy | | .254*** | .229*** | .187** |
| Perceived contract violations × emotion regulation skills | | | .069* | |
| Perceived contract violations × work-related self-efficacy | | | | .090** |
| R ² | .026 | .421 | .434 | .446 |
| R ² change | | .395*** | .013* | .025** |

Notes: N = 178

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; + $p < .10$ (two-tailed tests).

Figure 1: Conceptual model

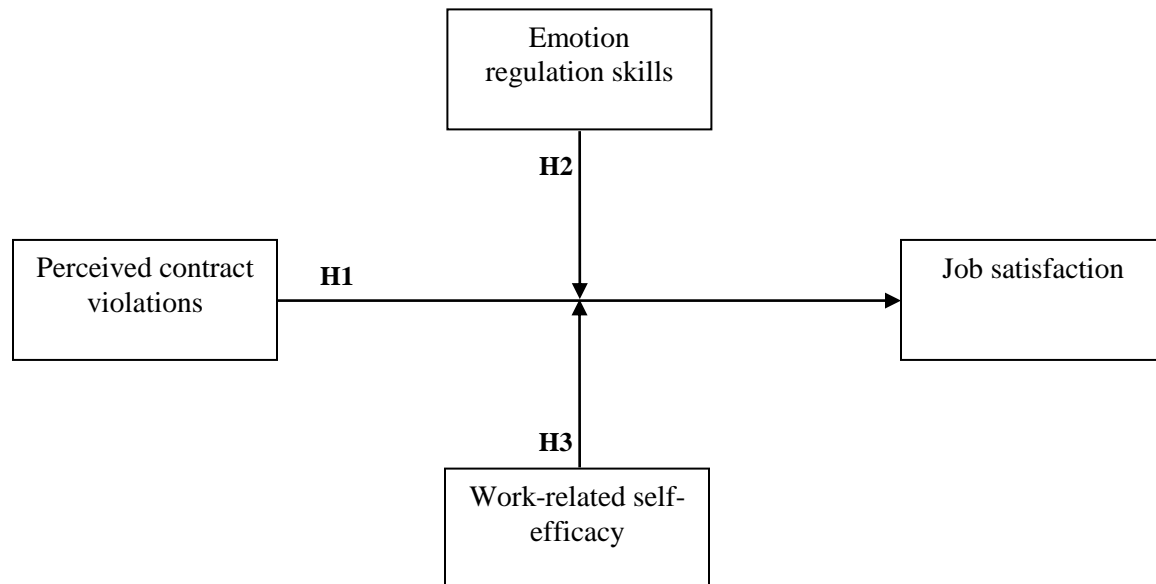


Figure 2: Moderating effect of emotion regulation skills on the relationship between perceived contract violations and job satisfaction

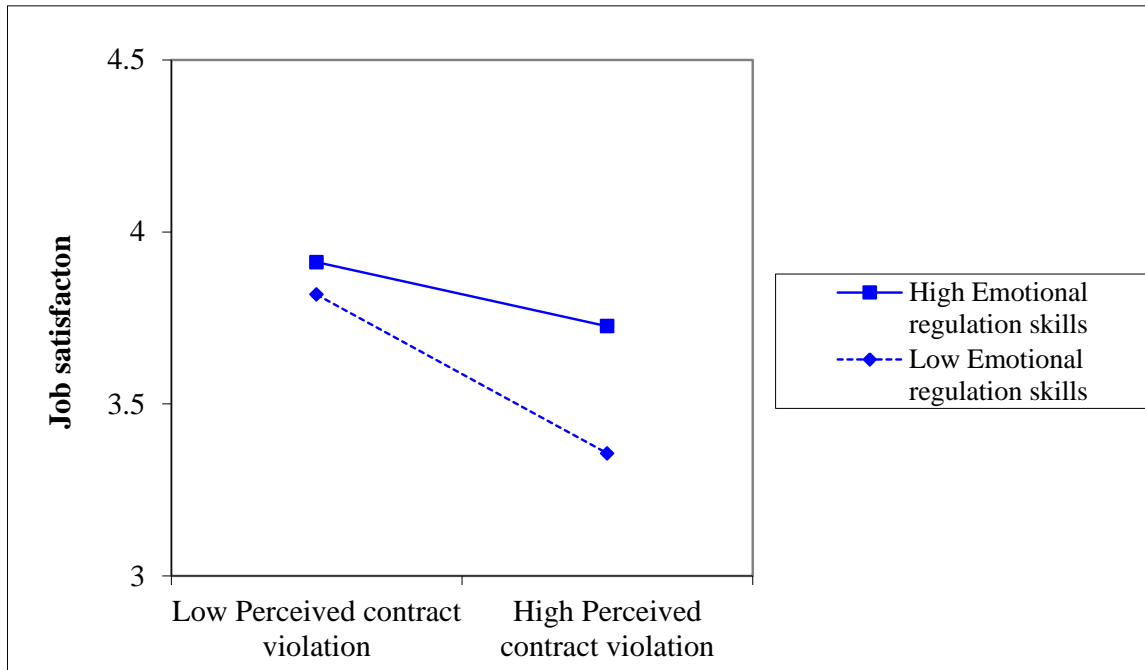


Figure 3: Moderating effect of work-related self-efficacy on the relationship between perceived contract violations and job satisfaction

